



## **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF FUNDING FOR THE CONNECTICUT FAIR HOUSING CENTER**

Senator Harp, Representative Walker, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you regarding funding for the Connecticut Fair Housing Center. My name is Erin Kemple. I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Fair Housing Center (hereinafter "the Center"). The Connecticut Fair Housing Center is a private non-profit dedicated to ensuring that all Connecticut residents have access to the housing of their choice. To fulfill the Center's mission, the organization:

- investigates claims of discrimination and provides legal representation to the victims of housing discrimination;
- works with state and local governments to ensure that they fulfill their obligations under the fair housing laws; and
- promotes integration through education on the fair housing laws, providing access to areas of opportunity, and stabilizing neighborhoods through foreclosure prevention.

First, let me begin by thanking you for your support for the Center in the FY2012 budget. Because of your efforts, the Center has not only survived but thrived. As a result of the funding received in 2011, we were able to accomplish the following:

- Assisted more than 200 households with housing discrimination complaints;

- Kept several clients out of state-funded nursing homes and in their own homes in the community;
- Performed fair housing testing to determine if race was an impermissible factor in the decision making of housing providers and found discrimination in more than 80% of the tests performed;
- Won a precedent-setting fair housing case which gave families with children greater access to the housing of their choice;
- Obtained more than \$320,000 in compensation for the victims of housing discrimination;
- Opened up more than 200 units of housing formerly denied to people in the classes protected by the housing discrimination laws;
- Reached out to housing developers, community groups, health advocates, town zoning attorneys, federal, state and municipal government officials to discuss how to ensure that people of color in Connecticut have full access to communities with access to jobs, high performing schools, and safe neighborhoods;
- Taught fair housing classes for more than 1,000 Connecticut residents at housing authorities, community and faith based organizations, for landlords, homeless shelters, and nonprofit organizations serving seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities.

We ask that the Legislature again approve funding of \$308,750 to support this work.

Receiving this money is crucial to our efforts to eradicate housing discrimination in Connecticut.

With this money, the Center works closely with the state of Connecticut to ensure that the funding it receives from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) continues.

In order to receive Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and HOME money, the state

of Connecticut must “affirmatively further fair housing.” With the Center’s assistance, this requirement has been met for the last four years. The Center has trained town officials receiving CDBG money on how to comply with the fair housing laws, monitor their CDBG programs to ensure that there have been no violations of the federal fair housing laws, and undertake programs which remove any barriers to fair housing in their towns. When the State received Neighborhood Stabilization Plan money through the CDBG, the Center reviewed the state’s proposed application process and provided comments which ensured that the State’s obligation to affirmatively further fair housing was met.

In addition, the Center is working with the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CROG) to ensure that it includes fair housing components in its recent application for funding under the Sustainable Communities Initiative from HUD. This was a highly competitive grant process that resulted in CROG receiving a grant for \$4 million to assist in planning for the redevelopment of the I-91 corridor between Meriden and Springfield, MA. We have been told that including fair housing elements in the application made the application more attractive to HUD.

To save money and ensure that Connecticut citizens with disabilities are able to live in the community of their choice, Governor Malloy has proposed increasing the amount of supportive housing in the state. Through the federally funded Money Follows the Person program, transition coordinators such as Perish Reid, whose testimony has been provided to you, assists nursing home residents find housing and ensure they receive appropriate services. The Center works closely with Ms. Reid and other transition coordinators to help make these moves happen. In May 2010, the Center conducted a training for all of the Money Follows the Person transition coordinators in the state. We have since given fair housing trainings to people moving

from nursing homes into the community so that they are aware of their rights and understand how to request what they need to make their living situations work for them. In addition, the Center has received numerous calls from transition coordinators who need help getting people out of nursing homes. Too many landlords are afraid of renting to people with disabilities. The Center assists the transition coordinators in making sure that the fair housing laws are followed and that the people moving out of nursing homes are in the most appropriate living situation possible.

At this critical juncture it is all the more important that the work of the Center continue to improve housing opportunities for Connecticut residents, educate housing providers and attract resources to our state.

In the testimony and fact sheets included in your packets, our clients tell their stories much more eloquently than I can. Robert Robbins, a veteran with a sight disability, explains how he was threatened with eviction from his subsidized housing by the Connecticut Institute for the Blind. Ellison Findly, a professor at Trinity College whose daughter is disabled, sought the Center's help when her daughter needed to break her lease to move home. Marco Francia relates how as a landlord he sought the Center's help when an insurance company charged him a surcharge simply for renting to tenants receiving state or federal rental assistance. Jackie Grant also had difficulty with her rental assistance voucher when her current landlord told her they did "want that kind of people living here" adding that the complex had never taken vouchers and never would. The Center was able to help all of these people and many more during the last four years.

To ensure that the critical work of the Center continues in the future, we ask that this Committee approve funding of \$308,750 in funding for the Connecticut Fair Housing Center.

Thank you for your time and attention.